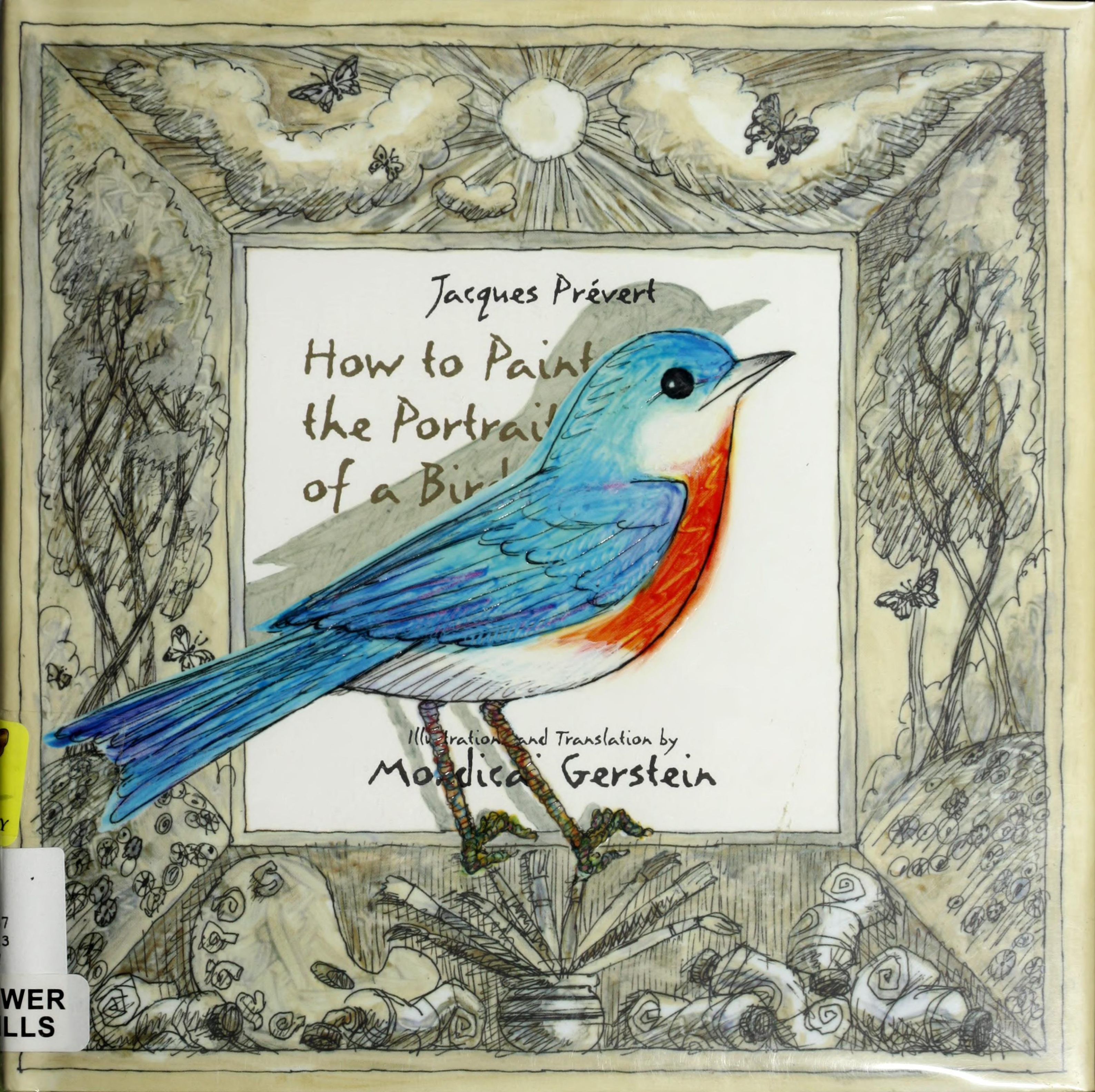
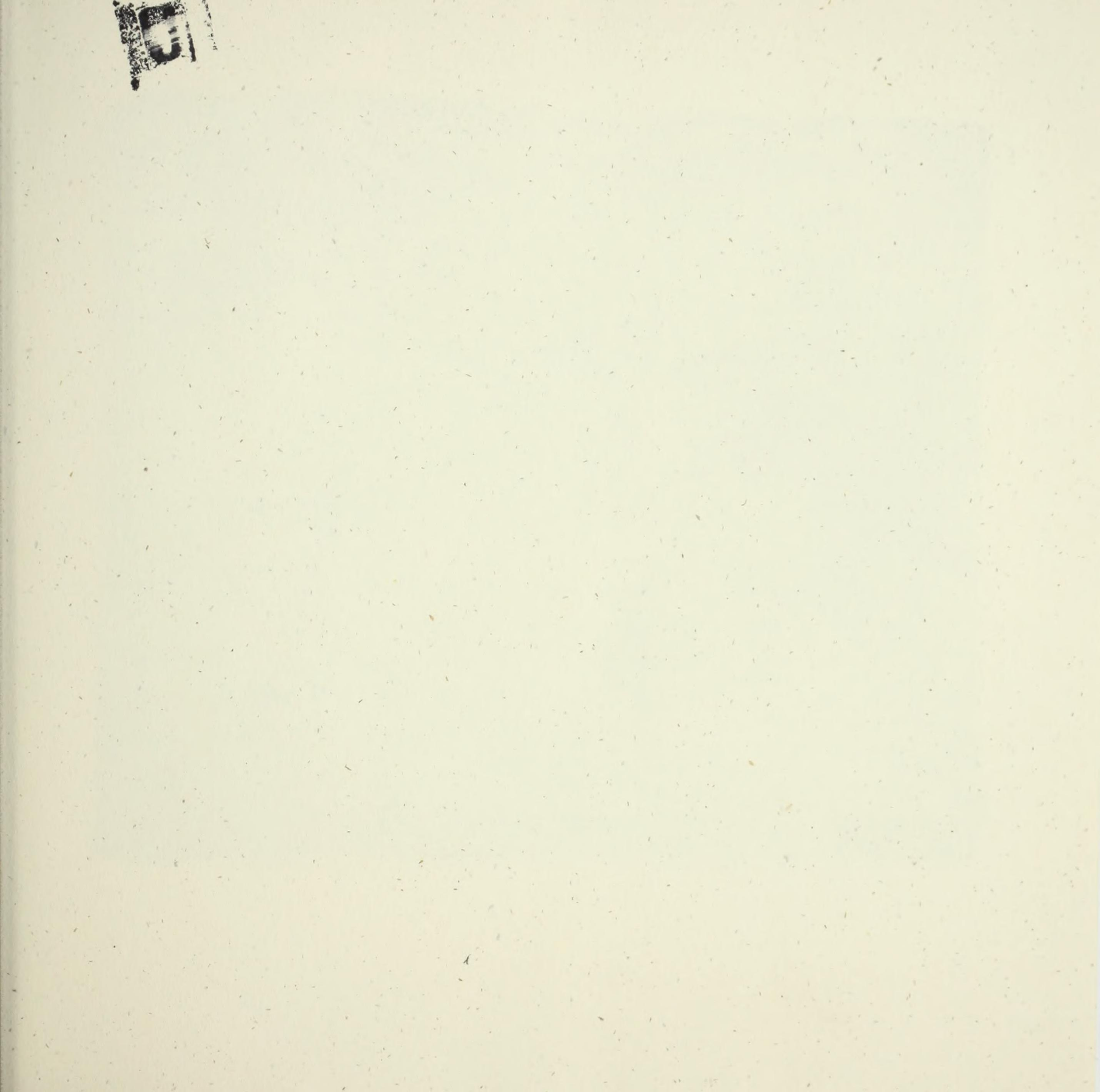

Jacques Prévert
How to Paint
the Portrai
of a Bir
Illustrations and Translation by
Mordicai Gerstein
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LLS

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A child wakes up, puts up an easel, picks up a brush and paints—paints a perch, a tree, the warmth of the sun and the sound of the summer breeze—and a bird comes to the child and sings.

Jacques Prévert's celebrated poem is given a magical new setting in this picture book by Caldecott Medalist Mordicai Gerstein. It's both his most personal and most universal book to date: a meditation on art, creativity, and wonder that has meaning for every reader.











Jacques Prévert

How to Paint the Portrait of a Bird

Illustrations and Translation by

Mordicai Gerstein



Roaring Brook Press
New York



First paint a cage



with an open door.



Then, in the cage, paint something for the bird,



something useful and beautiful, but simple.



Then take the picture to a garden



. . . or a park





. . . or a forest.



Put the picture under a tree.
Hide behind the tree.



Don't speak.
Don't move.




Sometimes the bird comes quickly.
But it can just as well take years before deciding.





If the bird doesn't come right away,
don't be discouraged. Wait.



Wait years if necessary.



It doesn't mean that your picture won't be good.



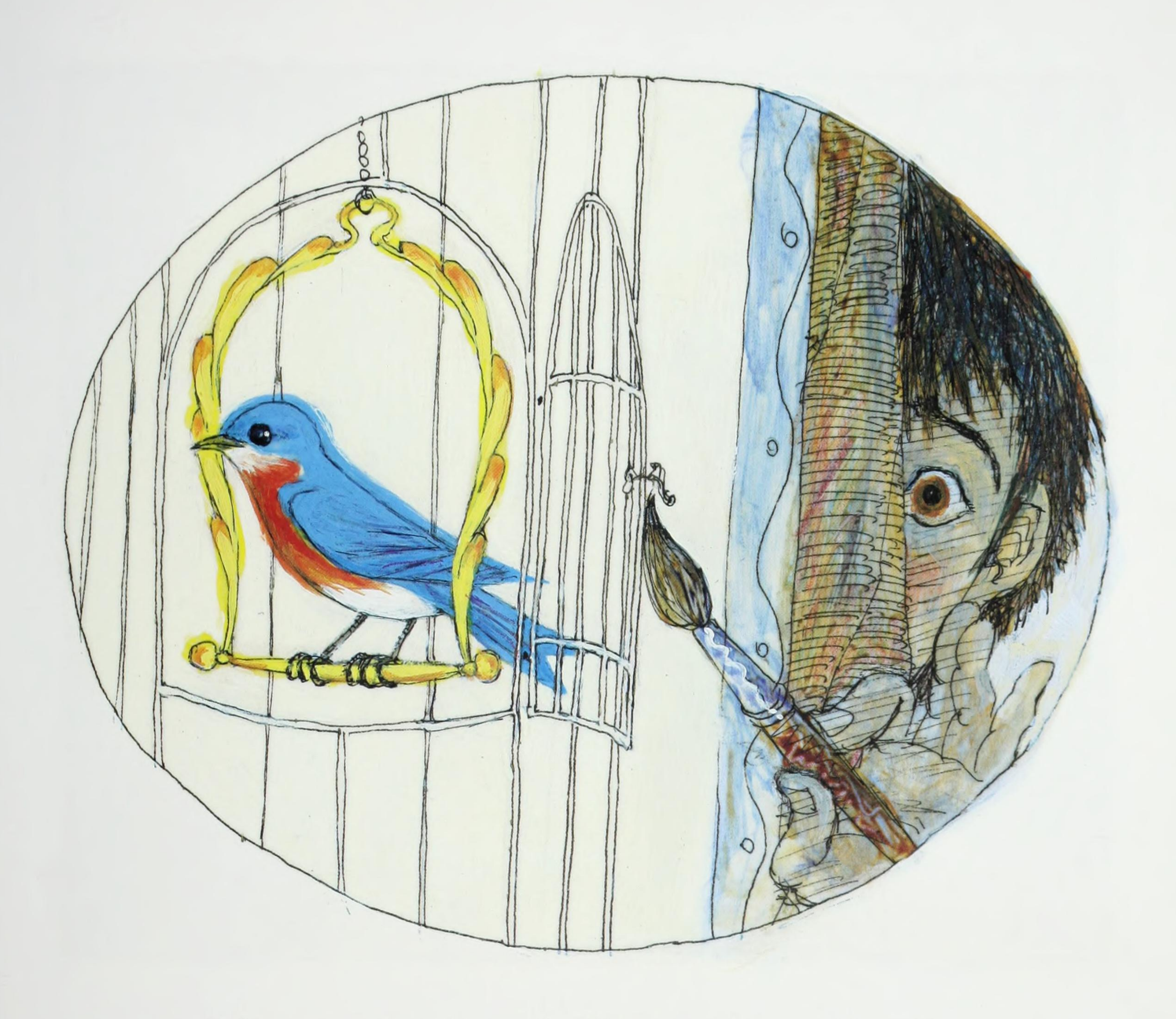
When the bird comes, if it comes,



remain absolutely silent.



Wait till the bird enters the cage.



Then gently close the door with your brush.



Then,



erase the cage, one bar at a time,
being very careful of the bird's feathers.



Now paint the portrait of the tree



with the prettiest branch for the bird.



Paint the green leaves and the summer breeze.



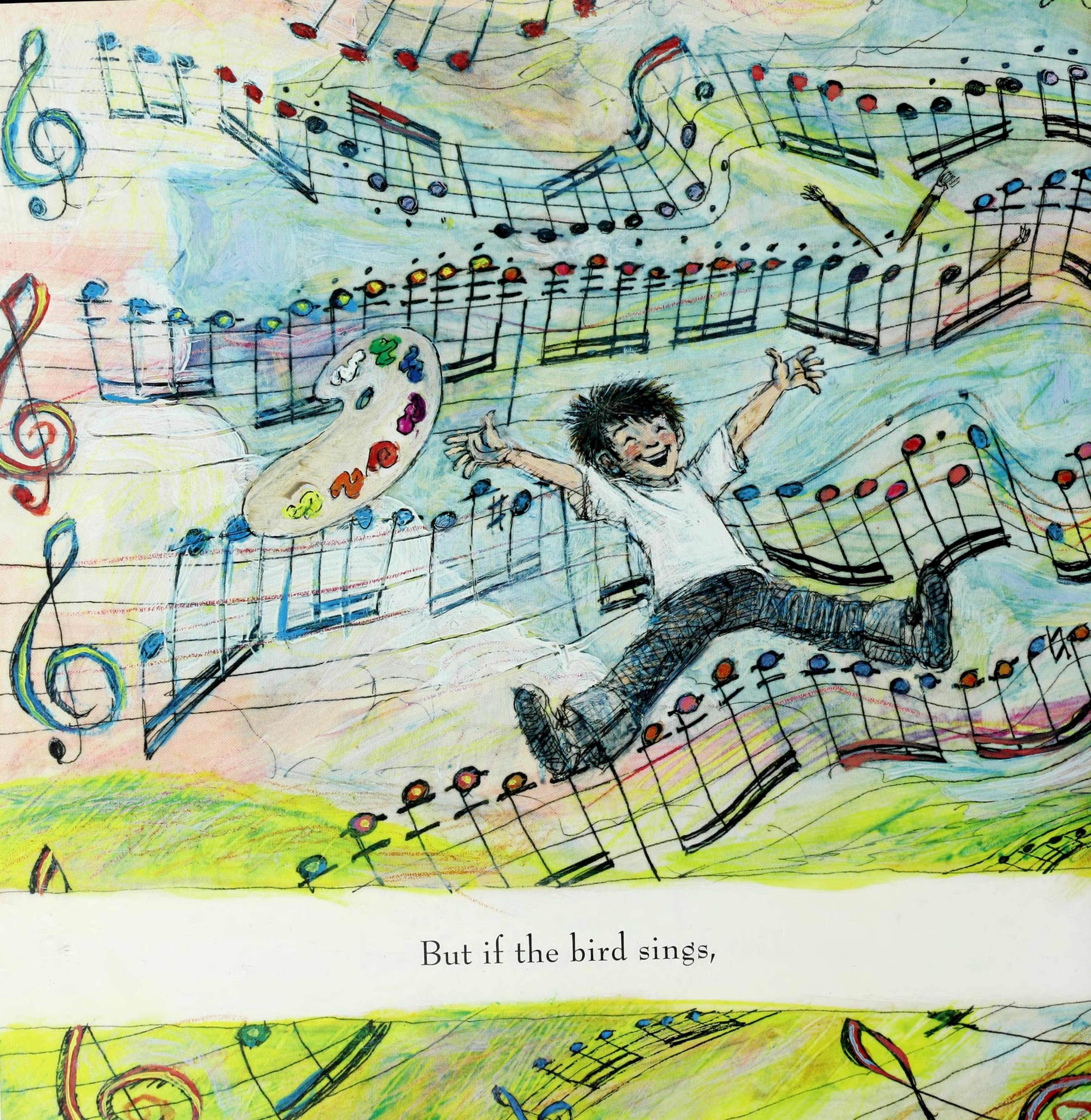
Paint the smell of the sunshine and the flowers,
and the songs of the bees and the butterflies.



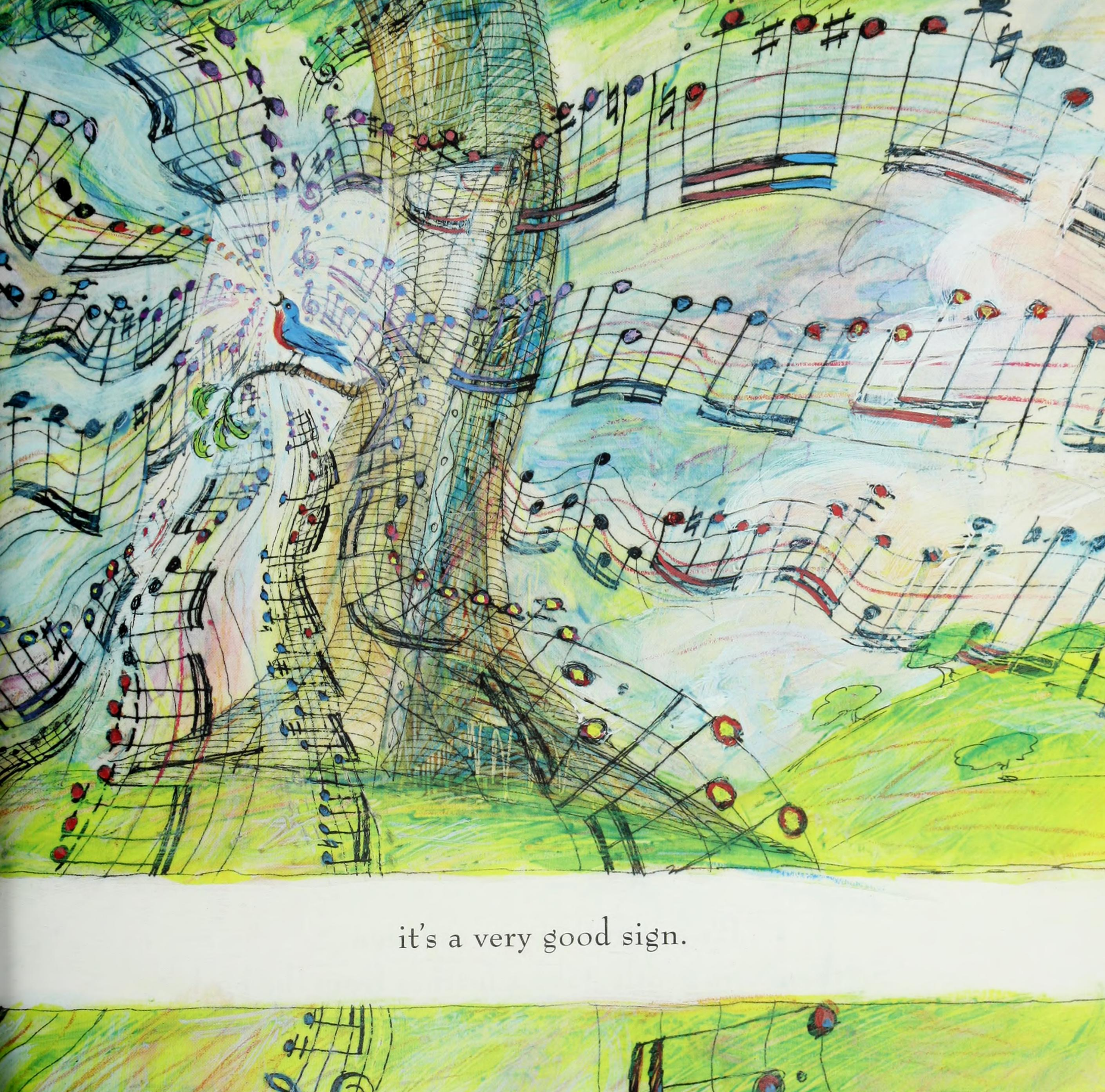
Then wait for the bird to sing.



If it doesn't sing, don't be sad.
You did your best.



But if the bird sings,



it's a very good sign.



It's a sign that you can sign.
So then, *very* gently, take a feather from the bird
and write your name in a corner of the picture.









(Tomorrow you can paint another one.)

For
Aram, Marina,
Daisy and Hugh
with all my
love.
—*M.G.*

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Mordicai Gerstein's recent books include the 2004 Caldecott Medal winner, *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*; *The Old Country*, a *New York Times* Notable Book; *Carolinda Clatter*, a *Booklist* Editors' Choice; and *The White Ram*, a Sidney Taylor Book Award Honor Book.

Mr. Gerstein lives in western Massachusetts with his wife, Susan Yard Harris.

Jacques Prévert was a poet and screenwriter whose poems—often chronicling life in Paris after the Second World War—are widely taught in French schools and have been sung by popular French vocalists as well as the American singer, Joan Baez. He wrote the screenplays for a number of important postwar French films, notably *Les enfants du paradis* (*The Children of Paradise,* 1945).

Jacques Prévert died in 1977.



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